

Chapter 1 — Project Background

In fall 2009, the California State Legislature passed a comprehensive package reforming governance of the Delta and related aspects of statewide water management. The Delta Reform Act of 2009 charged the DPC with developing:

“A proposal to protect, enhance, and sustain the unique cultural, historical, recreational, agricultural, and economic values of the Delta as an evolving place....The Commission shall include in the proposal a plan to establish state and federal designation of the Delta as a place of special significance, which may include application for a federal designation of the Delta as a National Heritage Area.”

This charge had its origins in the Delta Vision process, whose recommendations and Strategic Plan formed a major basis of the subsequent legislation. Importantly, the concept of NHA designation for the Delta originated not with the appointed Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force, but with the ‘Delta as a Place’ work group, which was comprised predominantly of Delta residents. Their recommendation to consider the appropriateness of NHA designation for the Delta was included in the Delta Vision Strategic Plan, and ultimately in the legislation.

During the course of this process a separate effort was initiated to establish a Delta NHA. In January 2011, Senator Dianne Feinstein, along with Senator Barbara Boxer, introduced legislation into the Senate for the Delta to receive NHA designation; S. 29, *a bill to establish the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area* (Appendix 1). Congressman John Garamendi, with co-sponsors Representatives George Miller, Doris Matsui, Jerry McNerney, and Mike Thompson, introduced companion legislation into the House of Representatives; H.R. 486, *a bill to establish the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta National Heritage Area* (Appendix 2). This legislation would designate the Delta as a NHA with the DPC as the management entity. In that capacity, the DPC would be required to write a management plan for the Delta NHA. The DPC has been monitoring the progress of the legislation while continuing to work on this feasibility study. In March 2012, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee’s National Parks Subcommittee conducted a hearing on several bills, including S. 29. At this hearing, NPS staff stated that the Department of the Interior (DOI) recognizes the importance of the Delta’s resources, but recommended deferring action on S. 29 until a feasibility study is complete as DOI believes it would be premature to recommend support for establishment of the Delta NHA without the evaluation of its feasibility. Solano County Supervisor Michael Reagan also testified and stated that Solano County is pleased to support S. 29, and explained the great significance of the Delta ecologically, culturally, agriculturally, historically, economically, and more.

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The work conducted by the DPC for this feasibility study is of value for both the study itself, as well as forming a basis for a NHA management plan, should designation occur.

NHAs are defined by the National Park System Advisory Board as:

“A place designated by the United States Congress where natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally-distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography. These areas tell nationally important stories about our nation and are representative of the national experience through both the physical features that remain and the traditions that have evolved within them.”

NHAs are inhabited regions with fully functioning economies. There is no federal management of land or federal land acquisition authority granted with the designation. NHA initiatives are planned and managed by a local entity, rather than the federal government. The NHA designation is as much about enhancement and preservation of a region’s heritage for locals as it is for outside visitors. Specific benefits of NHA designation include limited federal financial assistance, technical assistance from NPS, national recognition, the use of the NPS arrowhead symbol as a marketing strategy, and opportunities to connect with other federal agencies. Obtaining designation as a NHA can help develop partnerships and leverage funds for projects such as interpretive signage, historic preservation, regional marketing, heritage trail development, and more. Many NHAs have received funds from other federal agencies through a variety of programs, primarily the Department of Transportation for road and infrastructure improvements.

Once a NHA is designated by Congress, NPS staff are enlisted as partners with the management entity in planning and implementing NHA activities. NPS enters into a cooperative agreement with the management entity which is a statement of assent to mutually shared goals, which also serves as the legal vehicle through which the federal funds can be passed to the management entity. NPS is only involved in an advisory context, and does not make nor carry out management decisions.

Contacts With Other NHAs

Prior to undertaking the feasibility study process, DPC staff conducted phone interviews with representatives from NHAs in other parts of the country to ask some questions that Delta residents had initially posed. Interview questions were related to: NHA benefits, local concerns, federal involvement, and negative consequences. Below is a brief summary of responses. The full interviews can be found in Appendix 3.

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1. How have other regions benefited from NHA designation?

- Access to federal funds
- Increased capabilities to further leverage funds
- Tax revenues from increased visitor spending
- Increased clout for the region
- Partnering opportunities with NPS
- Collaboration amongst locals across government lines
- Increased recognition of the area's natural and cultural resources

2. How have decisions been made in regards to where to focus efforts on?

- Interested partners
- Public input
- Visions that were developed in the management plan
- Available grant funds

3. Have there been any local people opposed to getting the designation?


- Generally there has been significant local support
- Some opposition at first due to concerns regarding land use, but these went away as people recognized the benefits

4. Have there been any strings attached? Any federal control/restrictions?

- None
- No new federal controls
- No power given to management entity to supersede local decisions
- Communities can opt-out if interested
- Management entity cannot purchase/own land

5. Have there been any negative consequences of getting the designation?

- None
- Support has continued to grow from local community



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